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AUTHOR Olivares, Rafael; Lisi-Pawlak, Clorinda
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ABSTRACT

The newspaper can be a stimulating and effective teaching resource in the English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) classroom, bilingual classroom, or any class with limited-English-proficient (LEP) students. ESL teachers can use English-language newspapers to teach both basic language skills and content areas (math, science, social studies). Mainstream classroom teachers with LEP students can use newspapers to provide situations for second language learning. Small-group work can provide LEP students with a learning environment conducive to comprehension and production in an academic setting. The materials can also provide varied opportunities for creative communication between LEP students and classmates. Native-language newspapers can be used to develop first-language literacy skills in the bilingual classroom or to explore ethnicity. For early elementary grades, activities should be hands-on and theme-oriented: for example, searches for foods and for letters with which their names begin. In upper elementary grades, comics can be used in a variety of creative exercises. Junior high school students might enjoy using sports and entertainment sections. At the high school level, care must be taken that materials and activities are appropriate to young adults. Newspapers can both develop language skills and provide exposure to mainstream culture. (MSE)

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Teaching Language Minority Students Through the Newspaper

by Rafael Olivares

and

Clorinda Lisi-Pawlak

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

QUEENS COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Teaching Language Minority Students Through the Newspaper

The newspaper can be a stimulating and effective teaching resource in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom, the Bilingual classroom or in any classroom with limited English proficient (LEP) students. Teachers of ESL can use English language newspapers to teach not only basic language skills but content areas such as Math, Science and Social Studies as well. Mainstream or regular classroom teachers with LEP students can use the English language newspaper to provide situations for second language acquisition. Working in small groups with the newspaper provide LEP students with a learning environment conducive for comprehension and production of a second language in an academic setting. The newspaper can also provide a wealth of opportunities for creative communication between LAP students and their classmates.

Due to the philosophical basis of bilingual education and the unique socio-linguistic and ethnic characteristics of the bilingual classroom, teachers working with these students can use both native language newspapers and English language newspapers. Both papers can help language minority students develop linguistics and academic skills in the first as well as in the second language. There also exists in our schools a population of middle to high school students who are limited English proficient (LEP) and who do not have any or very little schooling in their native countries. These students are preliterate or functionally literate in their first language (L_1) and have a weak grasp of English as a second language (L_2). This kind of student, as well as adults on the same level of literacy, are not motivated by nor want to be seen working with elementary level reading books. Newspapers in L_1 and L_2 can stimulate the desire to read and truly promote the development of literacy in both languages.

Academic experiences and latest research show that, literacy in L_1 will facilitate the transference of reading skills and competency in literacy in the Second Language for LEP youngsters and young adults.

Classroom activities linked to the second language newspaper can help language minority students learn this new language through content in a real and relevant way while continuing their development of academic competencies. In addition, entertainment, sports, food clothes and other features in the mainstream newspaper will expose language minority students to an accurate representation of day-to-day living and learning in the mainstream culture.

Activities linked to mother tongue newspapers in the bilingual classroom can help bridge the gap and cultural awareness between the school, the home, and the outside world through cultural awareness. Content and skill related activities can teach new material and reinforce previous learning in L_1. Furthermore, working with the native language newspaper encourages and enables language minority parents to participate in their children's homework.

In order to satisfy the linguistic needs of LEP students, activities with the newspaper should be planned for small group tasks; they must be student centered and they should provide opportunities to practice oral communication, reading and writing as much as possible.

Using the newspaper to develop the language skills of LEP students in kindergarten through third grade, the activities should be hands-on and theme-oriented. Activities using the native language newspaper should reinforce and develop L_2 skills, and serve as a springboard to develop proficiency in L_2. For example, children can go on a "hunt" through the native language newspaper searching for pictures of various types of food particular to both their first

language community and the American community.. Once the names of these foods are learned in the first language the students can begin working with sounds. Perhaps at this point the children can learn the initial sounds of each new vocabulary word and paste the pictures on alphabet charts. These alphabet charts can later be expanded with additional pictures, letters, and sight words from future native language hunts. Similar hunt activities can then be used with the mainstream or English language newspaper. Children can search for pictures of food items once again and learn their names in English. They can then paste their pictures on English alphabet charts according to initial sounds, just as they did in the L_1 activity. At this point, with a focus on developing proficiency in L_2 and stimulating creative use of L_2, students can participate in various language development activities. For example, following through with the food theme children produce L_2 and practice various L_2 grammatical functions at the same time; such as: a) talking about preferences, "I like to eat cereal for breakfast." b) past tense: "I had soup for lunch yesterday."

As a concluding activity, using native language materials children can discuss and explore ethnicity as related to the food theme with reference to unique foods, cooking styles, restaurants, and holiday traditions; followed by an exploration of American culture as it too relates to food.

For older children in grades four through six activities utilizing the comics in both the native language and the mainstream language newspapers can be used. Activities in L_1 can develop various reading comprehension skills. For example: children can place a mixed-up, cut-up cartoon strip in the correct order, paste on a large card, and color the frames. Using L_1 and focusing on the comprehension skills of sequencing and prediction/inference children can

discuss what is happening and what they think will happen next. They can draw "tomorrow's" cartoon strip with their own creative ending. A variation would be for the teacher to hold back the last frame of the comic and have the students draw and write their own endings. Similar activities can then be used with the mainstream or English language newspaper. The comic strips can again be cut-up and mixed-up. The children then paste the squares on a large card in the correct order. Following verbal instructions such as: "color the boy's hair brown and then color his pants green" the children proceed to color each frame. At this point, focusing on L_2 development and using the comic strip as motivation children can learn to verbally express their ideas in sequential order using sequence signal vocabulary such as: next, before and after. As a concluding activity children can practice and develop sequential comprehension skills through such activities as language activity stories in both L_1 and L_2 recounting a class trip experience or a whole class cooking activity where the students must follow a recipe in order to prepare the special dish.

For children who are in the junior high school one may wish to utilize the sports and entertainment sections of the newspaper. To help children at this age level develop communication skills in L_1 an example activity using the sports section would be to have the students examine the results of a particular game and then discuss the game. Afterwards, the children can pretend that they are at the game and prepare what may be a radio announcement of the game. An example activity using the entertainment section of the newspaper would be to have the children scan the movie sections and select a movie that they have seen. After analyzing the movie as far as where and when it is playing, the student can give a brief synopsis of the movie and his opinion of the movie to the other children

in the class. Focusing now on the objective of stimulating the creative use of L_2 , communication skills can be practiced and developed by using these same sections of the mainstream language newspaper. Results of baseball or football games can be discussed, followed by a group discussion where everyone gets the chance to talk, using the second language, about the sport they enjoy most. Pictures depicting various sports can be brought in by the teacher and the vocabulary surrounding each particular sport can be learned. The television listings can also be examined and children can talk about what they watched yesterday and what they plan to watch tonight. Various charts of most and least watched television shows can be made. Vocabulary surrounding the various types of programs shown on American television can be explored and discussed. As a concluding activity the class may organize and participate in a "GAME SHOW," either in L_1 or L_2, or perhaps some combination of both.

When teaching LEP students on the high school level special care must be taken to avoid using materials that are too childish. One must remember that these are young adults, who for the most part come into class with a fair amount of life experience and a strong hold on their first languages. The newspaper provides high interest information, photographs and pictures; and is written in language that can be both challenging and interesting for this age level student.

Articles in the native language newspaper can teach students about their culture and reinforce their L_1 skills. Ethnicity, as displayed in the food ads, the restaurant ads, interest articles, community affairs and events can be a focal point of learning. At the same time academic skills can be applied and practiced through these lessons. Articles in the mainstream language newspaper can be used to teach students about the American culture. American views on

politics and world events as well as ordinary accounts of daily American living are displayed throughout the newspaper. Such activities stimulate the learning of L_2, and provide a vehicle for practicing it. In addition the students' ever developing academic and language skills in both languages can be reinforced.

Concentrating on the theme of community events and the academic skill of sequencing students scan the native language newspaper for descriptions of upcoming events and plan a weekend of activities. Their plan can be written out in paragraph form or outline form. As an L_2 activity the mainstream language newspaper can be scanned for community events and another weekend of activities can be planned. At this point students can practice their L_2 conversation skills; maintaining the theme of leisure activities they can practice extending, accepting and rejecting invitations. As a concluding activity students can scan both the native language newspaper and the mainstream language newspaper for the restaurant reviews. The two articles can be read, discussed, and then compared/contrasted as far as type of food served, prices, decor and the overall review of the restaurant presented by the critics who wrote the articles.

In conclusion, a well-regulated and planned set of classroom activities utilizing the English newspaper can provide LEP students with both a variety of interesting situations and learning opportunities for second language acquisition, as well as exposure to many aspects of the mainstream culture. Using the native language newspaper in the bilingual classroom can improve student's native language skills and reinforce self-esteem through the promotion of knowledge and the encouragement of pride in their cultural backgrounds.